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Gov. Beshear Announces Bullying Prevention Recommendations

Panel implores community efforts to address 'public health issue'

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Oct. 20, 2015) – Governor Steve Beshear today called on lawmakers and Kentucky's future leaders to adopt new recommendations for schools, public agencies and communities to stop youth bullying.

Alongside members of the Kentucky Youth Bullying Prevention Task Force, Gov. Beshear gave highlights of the group's [29-page report](#), which gives four main recommendations to reduce youth bullying and to help foster safer, harassment-free school environments.

Among the panel's recommendations:

- Adopt one statewide, formal definition of bullying.
- Adopt evidence-based standards within all school districts to promote a positive climate and culture.
- Support and invest in behavioral health counselors at the local school level as a preventive measure.
- Establish and fund a sustainable state-level agency or office that coordinates and supports community-driven efforts to promote bullying prevention and community programs.

"By studying bullying, and by recommending practices and policies to prevent and respond to it, the panel is empowering students, parents and school and community leaders to root out intimidation and harassment in our communities," Gov. Beshear said. "I ask the lawmakers who

served on this task force and their respective chambers to work with our next Governor, our school districts, community leaders and public health officials to implement these critical recommendations.”

The task force, a 26-member panel appointed by Gov. Beshear, has been meeting for the past year, hearing from safety experts and discussing potential strategies to address the problem of youth bullying.

Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS) Secretary Audrey Tayse Haynes, who co-chaired the panel with former Commissioner of the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) Terry Holliday, said she is pleased that the task force was able to recommend a layer of prevention strategies.

“We understand that while there is no ‘magic solution’ to ending youth bullying, part of the solution is simply raising awareness,” she said. “Our panel heard many times that adults had no idea about certain bullying incidences until they reached a crisis stage. We need community leaders to keep speaking up about bullying prevention so that it is easier for others – especially young people – to talk about it.”

Holliday and Haynes wrote to Gov. Beshear last year and urged him to create the task force. Membership on the task force included legislators and school, youth, safety and community officials. The task force also included a middle-school student who experienced bullying when she was younger. Eleven-year-old Morgan Guess – and her mother – participated on the bullying prevention panel.

“It has been an honor for me to serve on this task force and I am grateful to Gov. Beshear for allowing me the opportunity to represent Kentucky students,” said Morgan Guess, of Paducah. “The last year has shown me that there are citizens all across Kentucky who are committed to changing the culture of bullying and given me hope for Kentucky’s future. This is an important start, but we have more to do. I am committed to doing my part. I am counting on your commitment as well. All Kentucky students are.”

Secretary Haynes said the task force learned that the best response to bullying is for communities to act before it occurs.

“Rather than implement measures that merely react to bullying, we have to focus on prevention efforts,” she said. “We need to establish safe and supportive school environments that empower youth to seek success.”

And, Haynes said, the report also emphasizes that bullying is not just a school problem.

“Bullying is not a problem to be addressed solely by school administrators, or even state social workers,” she said. “None of us can be bystanders in this effort. To really thrive, our youth need the right tools and influences to learn to react to disappointment and to have healthy relationships with others. That is going to take a commitment from us all.”

The panel established that bullying is a form of violence and can cause severe physical, social and emotional health problems. The group adapted a four-step approach suggested by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to address public health issues.

A recent example of collaboration between KDE and CHFS is the School-Based Behavioral Screening Initiative, launched in early 2014.

The goal of this initiative is to help middle and high school personnel recognize when a student may be showing signs of a behavioral health need. Students may be briefly screened with a validated tool, and based on the identified need, referred for services, supports or further assessment, when appropriate.

“I’m glad we’re addressing this, because it is a major public health issue. It affects children and families alike, both mentally and physically,” said Rep. Rita Smart, of Richmond. “This report will give us the foundation we need to take the next step in this area, and I look forward to doing whatever else I can to help.”

“For too long, bullying was downplayed as an issue, but it has gotten much more attention in recent years as we gain a better understanding of its long-term impact on those victimized as well as those who are doing the bullying,” said Rep. Derrick Graham, of Frankfort. “If we do not take corrective action when they are young, we risk seeing fixable problems spiraling out of control. I think the findings in this report will give us better tools to take on this task in the years ahead.”

School districts that have implemented this initiative have reported the ability to better plan ahead to help students, to better identify when a student’s behavior might be a symptom of a greater problem, and to meet the needs of their students more responsively.

Learn more about the School-Based Behavioral Health Screening Initiative [here](#).

As part of today’s announcement, Gov. Beshear proclaimed this week as [Safe Schools Week in Kentucky](#), a designation that coincides with the release of the findings of the Kentucky Youth Bullying Prevention Task Force.

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Gov. Beshear’s press releases are available on his official website at www.governor.ky.gov